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Your consumer education connection

The Food Safety Educator

Volume 5, No. 2 2000

■ Time To Partner!

A new grassroots community workbook soon to be published by the Fight BAC!™ campaign summarizes it all up front: "You can't do it alone!"

The workbook, due out this fall, is a how-to manual on partnerships and grassroots food safety educational campaigns. It's called "Using Partnerships to Fight BAC!™ A Workbook for Local Food Safety Educators."

"Educators at the local level are strapped for time, money and staff--and their to-do list just keeps growing. This workbook is a way to help them link up with others in their communities. There's power in partnerships," says Susan Conley, director of the food safety education staff for the Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Conley knows about the power of partnerships from personal experience. As an education coordinator with the Fight BAC!™ campaign in 1999, she pilot-tested two grassroots campaigns in San Diego, Ca., and Annapolis, Md.

The new workbook is the result of those pilot projects as well as partnering activities of other BAC! fighters throughout the country.

While the idea of partnerships may seem unsettling to people used to operating on their own, there is no doubt that there is more impact when a team is at work.

A look at the daily newspaper shows that the benefit of partnerships is an idea emerging as a significant force among industries, organizations and charity groups as they join forces, accomplishing more together than they could alone.

The workbook walks educators through the partnering process, including:

- How to identify partners, including a list of potential cooperators at state and local levels as well as some nontraditional cooperators
- How to set up planning and coordinating meetings and the partnering process
- Guidelines for successful partnering, including identifying specific goals and timeframes
- Sample worksheets for coordinating campaign logistics
- Tips for working with the media and getting people to "come to the party!"
- Ready-to-use materials including brochures, feature stories, and graphics.

"The Fight BAC!™ campaign has done an incredible job producing educational tools--brochures, graphics, curriculums. The grassroots handbook takes the campaign one step further. It gives people the hands-on advice they need to get a campaign up and running in their community.

"Grassroots campaigns and partnering not only help people learn about food safety, they reinforce the very idea of community. It gives people a chance to give something back--to be a part of their community," Conley noted. "It's amazing how many people 'step up' when you give them a chance."

Stay tuned for a video teleconference coming this September with "how-to-use" information on the workbook. Orders for the workbook can be faxed to: 202/720-9062; or emailed to: fsis.outreach@usda.gov or write: USDA/FSIS, Food Safety Education Staff, Room 2942 South Bldg., 14th and Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250. ●

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CURRENT SERIALS ACQUISITION

Food Safety for Volunteer Food Handlers

"How did this happen? This was going to be so easy. Just a little fund-raising dinner for the school...I thought maybe 50 people max! Now I'm looking at fixing turkey, potatoes and greens for 150!"

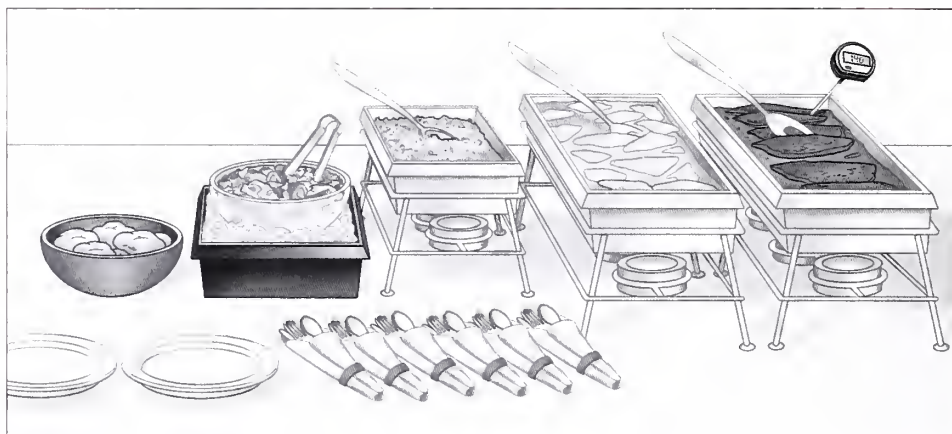
Do you read this and think: been there, done that?

Lots of us have. This is a country of volunteers and fund-raising dinners as well as informal get-togethers like block parties.

For a number of reasons, volunteer food handlers can be in a tough spot when it comes to handling food safely. According to Robyn Sadagursky of the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline, "people who are great cooks at home, don't necessarily know how to safely fix large quantities of food.

"There are a lot of things that are different when you're cooking for large groups, including the complexities of safely transporting food and serving.

"And, unlike other types of foodservice—like restaurants and grocery stores—these types of dinners aren't generally supervised by local



public health departments," Sadagursky said.

To help keep fund-raising and charity dinners running safely, Sadagursky has authored a new publication called "Cooking for Groups: A Volunteer's Guide to Food Safety."

According to Sadagursky, some of the key food safety tips for groups detailed in the new publication include:

- planning and shopping
- safely transporting food
- cooking foods to safe internal temperatures—and checking tempera-

tures with a food thermometer

- keeping foods in serving lines either cold or hot, and
- safely storing leftovers.

The publication also includes a chart of safe internal cooking temperatures as well as a cold-storage chart and shelf-stable storage chart.

Copies of the publication are available by calling the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555. Or you can download from the web: www.fsis.usda.gov and click on "Publications." ●

A Serious Foodborne Illness Can Be Prevented

Toxoplasmosis is an illness which can be foodborne and present serious health problems for an unborn child if a pregnant woman becomes infected.

The illness is caused by a parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii*. People can contract the parasite by eating meat that is infected or by contamination of food with soil that contains the parasite.

Toxoplasmosis was highlighted in the March 31, 2000, issue of the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR), published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (Web access: www.cdc.gov/epo/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr4902a5.htm)

The article summarizes the recom-

mendations of a national workshop convened on the topic in September 1998 by CDC.

A primary conclusion: "Many cases of congenital toxoplasmosis can be prevented."

When toxoplasmosis is transmitted from a pregnant woman to her unborn child it can cause severe illness, including mental retardation, blindness and seizures.

CDC estimates that the illness causes between 400 and 4,000 cases a year and may be the third leading cause of death due to foodborne illness.

As a result of the group's recommendations, CDC is currently working to

improve estimates of the numbers of cases and provide education for pregnant women and health care providers.

Among CDC's prevention tips for consumers:

- Cook food thoroughly to 160 degrees F and check internal temperatures with a food thermometer.
- Peel or thoroughly wash vegetables and fruits before eating.
- Since cats can be a source of the parasite, pregnant women are advised not to change cat litter. Also important—wear gloves while gardening.

Check the MMWR article for additional prevention advice. ●

■ Meat and Poultry Recalls

Food recalls are a challenge: a challenge in terms of logistics and a challenge in terms of communicating public health concerns.

To illustrate how daunting the logistics can be, one U.S. company recently provided an example of what happened to 1 day's production in a commercial beef slaughter and fabrication facility.

In a mock recall, some 2.6 million pounds of finished product were dispersed to 87 distributors and 40 processors in 34 states and 4 countries. Eighty percent of the 1 day's production was distributed within 2 days—the entire production within a week.

To help consumers and public health educators better understand how meat and poultry recalls work and the public health implications of recalls, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) Food Safety Education Staff recently published a Focus on Recalls (available through the web at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/pubs/recallfocus.htm>).

Among other things, the Focus on Recalls explains:

- ***Who decides there should be a recall:***

All recalls are voluntary. They may be initiated by the manufacturer or distributor—or at the request of FSIS.

- ***How are unsafe products discovered?***

Unsafe or improperly labeled meat and poultry can come to the attention

In a mock recall, some 2.6 million pounds of finished product were dispersed to 87 distributors and 40 processors in 34 states and 4 countries. Eighty percent of the 1-day's production was distributed within 2 days—the entire production within a week.

of FSIS in many different ways, including pathogen testing programs initiated by FSIS, food producers, and states—as well as through foodborne illness outbreaks.

- ***Different kinds of recalls:***

There are three separate classes of recalls.

Class I involves a health hazard situation where there is a reasonable probability that eating the food will cause health problems or death.

An example would be the detection of *Listeria monocytogenes* in a ready-to-eat food.

Class II involves a potential health situation where there is a remote probability of adverse health consequences from eating the food.

An example would be the presence of dry milk, a Class II allergen, as an ingredient in sausage without mention of the dry milk on the label.

Class III involves a situation when eating the food will not cause adverse health consequences.

An example would be an improperly labeled processed meat product in which added water is not listed on the label as required by federal regulations.

- ***How does FSIS notify the public when a product is recalled?***

For every recall, FSIS notifies the public in two ways—through a press release and a Recall Notification Report (RNR). Both are posted on the FSIS Recall Information Center web site:

www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/recalls/rec_intr.htm

The Recall Notification Report is designed to provide the public and public health officials with available detailed information about meat and poultry recalls.

Information in the Retail Notification Report includes:

- a description of the food being recalled and any identifying codes
- the reason for the recall
- the name of the producing establishment
- distribution information
- the recall classification, and
- the appropriate contact persons for FSIS and the recall company.

Consumers with questions about meat and poultry recalls may also call the toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 800-535-4555. ●

FSIS Recall Information Center:
www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/recalls/rec_intr.htm

A Wealth of Information: CDC's New Food Safety Web Site

Did you know that more than 250 different types of foodborne diseases have been described?

Or, that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that there are 38 cases of salmonellosis for every case that's actually diagnosed and reported?

Or how about this fact:

A bottle-fed infant is at higher risk for severe infections with Salmonella or other bacteria that can grow in a bottle of warm formula if it is left at room temperature for many hours.

These are just a few of the interesting facts culled from the Frequently Asked Questions page on the new CDC web site: www.cdc.gov/foodsafety.

Click on this web page and you'll find links to all kinds of information. And, it's clearly presented and written in language that everyone can understand.

You'll find information on:

- Diseases and pathogens

- Foods and high-risk groups
- Outbreak investigations
- Educational resources
- Publications and articles, and
- Food safety image library.

The Hot Topics link takes you to subjects like:

- Antibiotic resistance
- Genetically modified foods
- Irradiation, and
- School food safety.

Click on Educational Resources and you go to a site with links to publications as well as web sites including:

- ABC's of Safe and Healthy Childcare
- Excellence in Curriculum Integration Through Teaching Epidemiology
- Field Investigation: Global Healthy Odyssey
- Fight BAC!™ and the Partnership for Food Safety Education
- Public Health Training Network
- Surveillance in a Suitcase

Take some time—make some time—to check out this valuable resource.

Excerpts: FAQ's on Foodborne Disease:

The link to the Frequently Asked Questions provides 15 pages of clearly written information explaining the basics as well as the complex.

Subjects include:

- What is foodborne disease?
- How are foodborne diseases diagnosed?
- How are outbreaks of foodborne disease detected?
- How do public health departments investigate outbreaks?

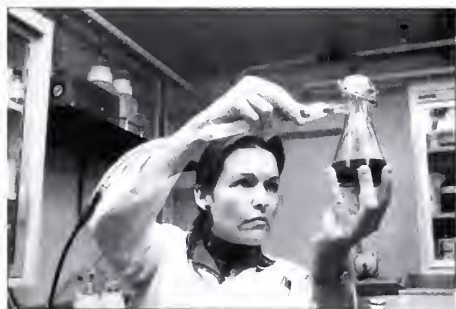
Here is just a sampling of some questions and answers:

What are the most common foodborne diseases?

The most commonly recognized foodborne infections are those caused by the bacteria *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, and *E. coli* O157:H7, and by a group of viruses called calicivirus, also known as the Norwalk and Norwalk-like viruses.

Campylobacter is a bacterial pathogen that causes fever, diarrhea, and abdominal cramps. It is the most commonly identified bacterial cause of diarrheal illness in the world. These bacteria live in the intestines of healthy birds, and most raw poultry meat has *Campylobacter* on it. Eating undercooked chicken, or other food that has been contaminated with juices dripping from raw chicken is the most frequent source of this infection.

Salmonella is also a bacterium that is widespread in the intestines of birds, reptiles and mammals. It can



www.cdc.gov/foodsafety

spread to humans via a variety of different foods of animal origin.

The illness it causes, salmonellosis, typically includes fever, diarrhea and abdominal cramps. In persons with poor underlying health or weakened immune systems, it can invade the bloodstream and cause life-threatening infections.

E. coli O157:H7 is a bacterial pathogen that has a reservoir in cattle and other similar animals. Human illness typically follows consumption of food or water that has been contaminated with microscopic amounts of cow feces. The illness it causes is often a severe and bloody diarrhea and painful abdominal cramps, without much fever.

In 3% to 5% of cases, a complication called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) can occur several weeks after the initial symptoms. This severe complication includes temporary anemia, profuse bleeding, and kidney failure.

Calicivirus, or Norwalk-like virus, is an extremely common cause of foodborne illness, though it is rarely diagnosed, because the laboratory test is not widely available. It causes an acute gastrointestinal illness, usually with more vomiting than diarrhea, that resolves within 2 days.

Unlike many foodborne pathogens that have animal reservoirs, it is believed that Norwalk-like viruses spread primarily from one infected person to another. Infected kitchen workers can contaminate a salad or sandwich as they prepare it, if they have the virus on their hands. Infected fishermen have contaminated oysters as they harvested them.

Are the types of foodborne disease changing?

The spectrum of foodborne disease is constantly changing. A century ago, typhoid fever, tuberculosis and cholera were common foodborne diseases.

Improvements in food safety, such as pasteurization of milk, safe canning, and disinfection of water supplies, have conquered those diseases.

Today other foodborne infections have taken their place, including some that have only recently been discovered...

In the last 15 years, several important diseases of unknown cause have turned out to be complications of foodborne infection. For example, we now know that the Guillain-Barré syndrome can be caused by *Campylobacter* infection, and that the most common cause of acute kidney failure in children, hemolytic uremic syndrome, is caused by infection with *E. coli* O157:H7 and related bacteria.

What are some unsolved problems in foodborne disease?

In the future, other disease whose origins are currently unknown may turn out to be related to foodborne infections.

As new foodborne problems emerge, many questions need to be answered before the problem can be successfully controlled. It takes careful scientific observation and research to answer these questions.

Some pressing unanswered questions include:

- How do the foodborne pathogens spread among the animals themselves, and how can this be prevented? If we could prevent the

animals from becoming infected in the first place, we would not have as much illness in the humans who eat them.

- What is the microbial cause of outbreaks in which no pathogen can be identified by current methods? This is the case for over half of the reported foodborne outbreaks.

- Will wider application of existing experimental diagnostic methods help, or are these outbreaks caused by pathogens we simply do not yet know how to identify?

- What would be the impact of basic food safety education of restaurant workers on the risk of foodborne disease among restaurant patrons?

- How can the food and water that animals consume be made safer?

- How can we dispose of animal manure usefully, without threatening the food supply and the environment?

- How can basic food safety principles be most effectively taught to school children?

- How can we be sure food safety standards in other countries are as good as those in the United States? As we import more of our fresh foods from other countries, we need to be confident that they are produced with the same level of safety as food in the United States.

- What control strategies in the slaughter plant will reduce the contamination of poultry meat with *Campylobacter*?

- How can irradiation of certain high-risk foods, such as ground beef, be used most effectively?

Thermy™ Is Launched!

A consumer education campaign designed to encourage the use of food thermometers was launched in May by Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman.

The Thermy™ character and consumer education materials were developed by the Food Safety and Inspection Service. The campaign encourages consumers to use a food thermometer to make sure that foods like meat, poultry and egg dishes are cooked to a safe internal temperature.

Throughout the summer months, grocery stores are planning on distributing hundreds of thousands of copies of Thermy™ brochures as well as including Thermy™ graphics on grocery bags, recipe cards and in-store displays.

To check out the latest on the campaign, go to: www.fsis.usda.gov/thermy ●



See You in September—National Food Safety Education Month

Consumer educators and restaurant and foodservice professionals will be working again this year to teach food safety for National Food Safety Education MonthSM in September.

The theme this year: “Be Smart Keep Foods Apart—Don’t Cross-contaminate!”

Cross-contamination is the transfer of harmful bacteria from one food to another if foods, cutting boards, utensils, etc., are not handled properly. This is especially true when handling raw meat, poultry, and seafood—but also applies to unwashed fresh produce.

“Separate,” along with “Cook,” “Clean,” and “Chill,” are the four food safety messages promoted by the Fight BAC!™ campaign.

National Food Safety Education MonthSM was created 6 years ago by the International Food Safety Council, a coalition of restaurant and

foodservice professionals.

As in past years, the Food Safety and Inspection Service and Food and Drug Administration are teaming up to produce a “Consumer Education Planning Guide” that will be distributed nationwide—and available through the web. Go to: www.FoodSafety.gov/September

The “Consumer Education Planning Guide” contains:

- suggestions for celebrating National Food Safety Education MonthSM
- reproducible brochures
- artwork, fact sheets
- a sample proclamation
- publicity materials, and
- games and activities for children.

The International Food Safety Council also produces and distributes a planning guide for restaurants and foodservice. It’s available through the web: www.foodsafetycouncil.org ●

Save This Date! September 26 Save This Time! 1-3 p.m.

Tune in for the Food Safety Educators Video Teleconference sponsored by the Food Safety and Inspection Service and the Food and Drug Administration.

Check the FoodSafety.gov web site for transponder coordinates.

- Included in the teleconference:
- how to use the new publication, “Using Partnerships to Fight BAC!™ A Workbook for Local Food Safety Educators”
 - an update on National Food Safety Education Month activities
 - Thermy™ Tips
 - previews of upcoming educational campaigns—and more!!



■ FSIS Is Recruiting!

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is recruiting nationwide for food inspectors for meat and poultry plants.

Inspection positions are both full time and intermittent. There are also openings for veterinary medical officers.

To check out openings, go to: www.fsis.gov and click on "Employment Information."

Or, contact FSIS Human Resources Division at 1-800-370-3747. ●

■ Irradiation Info

FSIS is posting on the web the agency's responses to questions from industry and other constituent groups concerning labeling, ingredient, packaging material, and procedural issues on meat irradiation.

To access this irradiation information—as well as a new consumer Q&A—produced by FSIS go to: www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/topics/irrmenu.htm.

Also for consumers: a new brochure from the Food and Drug Administration providing answers to basic questions about irradiation is now available. It is on the web. Go to: www.fda.gov/opacom/catalog/irradbro.html. ●

■ FoodService Plan Review Guide

The Food and Drug Administration has published a new document to help people conducting a foodservice plan review. Whether you are a regulator or a foodservice operator, it's designed to help.

To access the guide, go to: <http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/previntr.html>. ●

■ CDC's Foodborne Disease Surveillance

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published results from the Foodborne Disease Surveillance from 1993 through 1997 in the March 17, 2000, issue of the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

(web site: www.cdc.gov/epo/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss4901a1.htm)

This report is compiled by CDC's passive surveillance system which records outbreaks reported to CDC by public health offices throughout the country.

The report notes that it is difficult to draw substantive conclusions because their data is limited: "only a fraction of these illnesses are routinely reported to CDC because a complex chain of events must occur...."

In addition, the causes of 68 percent of outbreaks are unidentified.

However, because of the incubation periods involved, the writers note that many unidentified causes may in fact be attributed to viruses, which "are probably a much more important cause of foodborne disease outbreaks than is currently recognized.

The writers note that with improved testing and reporting mechanisms, like PulseNet, more outbreaks will be identified in the future.

PulseNet is now operating in 32 states and CDC hopes to have it expanded to 40 states by the end of the year. ●

■ Consumer Advisory

For the Food and Drug Administration's guidance on the *Consumer Advisory* provision of the FDA Food Code, go to:

<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fc99guid.html>. ●

■ Antibiotics Harmful to Kids With *E. coli*

New research just published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* concludes that antibiotic treatment of children with *E. coli* O157:H7 infection increases the risk of hemolytic-uremic syndrome.

The study looked at 71 children under 10 years old, all ill from *E. coli*. Nine of the 71 children had received antibiotics. Ten of the 71 children developed hemolytic-uremic syndrome. Five of those 10 children had been treated with antibiotics.

The article was published June 29, 2000. It's available through the web: www.nejm.org. ●

■ www.FoodSafety.gov Gateway to Government Food Safety Information

This gateway site keeps growing and changing. You'll now find a link to food safety publications in foreign languages—including Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Portuguese. There are also some video materials in other languages.

According to site coordinator Ken Durham from the Food and Drug Administration, another new addition is Frequently Asked Questions.

"This will provide users with access to more than 500 topics people are frequently researching," Durham said.

Another good link to check, Durham says, is titled "Recent Additions."

While these sites aren't necessarily new in themselves, they are new links to FoodSafety.gov. ●

Clip and Save: Food Safety Web Sites

As evidenced by the many, many web sites already noted in this issue of *The Food Safety Educator*, the Internet has become the first stop in distributing information. If it's "out," it's up on the web.

Following is a list of just a few of the quick-check sites you might want to keep on hand.



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Food Safety Gateway Info,
www.FoodSafety.gov

U.S. Department of Agriculture
(USDA), www.usda.gov

Under USDA:

Agricultural Research Service,
www.usda.ars.gov

Food Safety and Inspection Service,
www.fsis.usda.gov

CSREES Food Safety and Quality,
www.ree.usda.gov/pas/programs/foodsafety

Center for Nutrition Policy and
Promotion, www.usda.gov/cnpp

USDA/FDA Foodborne Illness
Education Information Center,
www.nal.usda.gov/foodborne

Food and Nutrition Service—
Nutrition Assistance Program,
www.fns.usda.gov/fns

Food and Nutrition Service—Team
Nutrition, www.fns.usda.gov/tn

National Agricultural Library,
www.nal.usda.gov

Other Government

Agencies:

Food and Drug Administration
(FDA), www.fda.gov

FDA Center for Food Safety and
Applied Nutrition,
www.cfsan.fda.gov

U.S. Department of Commerce—
Seafood Inspection Service, <http://seafood.nmfs.gov>

Environmental Protection Agency,
www.epa.gov/pesticides

Federal Trade Commission,
www.ftc.gov

Center for Disease Control and
Prevention, www.cdc.gov

Federal Consumer Information
Center, www.pueblo.gsa.gov

National Heart, Lung and Blood
Institute, www.nhlbi.nih.gov

International:

World Health Organization,
www.who.it/programmes/food_safety.htm

Organizations:

American Dietetic Association,
www.eatright.org

American School Food Service
Association, www.asfsa.org

Center for Science in the Public
Interest, www.cspinet.org

Food Marketing Institute,
www.fmi.org

Grocery Manufacturers of America,
www.gmabrands.com

International Food Information
Council, <http://ificinfo.health.org>

National Consumers League,
www.ncinet.org

National Food Processors Associa-
tion, www.safefood.org

National Restaurant Association,
www.restaurant.org ●

**For Links to Zillions of Other Sites, go to:
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodborne/fbindex/index.htm>**